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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that a conservative, illusory, and technocratic rationality pervades recent educational policymaking in New York State. A document called "A New Compact for Learning," published by the State Education Department in March 1991, is analyzed to show that technocratic rationality, a functionalist theory of educational policymaking and implementation, permeates the state's school improvement effort. Two interdependent components of the New Compact are categorized--the Global, or macro, and the Village, or micro component. The Global component is examined in terms of regents and economics; the Village in terms of shared purpose, teacher education, assessment, and choice. A discussion of the subcomponents attempts to demonstrate how the New Compact will very likely reify technocratic rationality both at the policymaking and procedural levels of public schooling throughout New York State. (Contains 28 endnotes.) (LMI)

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A NEW COMPACT FOR LEARNING:

REIFYING TECHNOCRATIC RATIONALITY IN

NEW YORK STATE

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> And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck around and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, - what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, - will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?[1]
>
> Plato

> Seek to preserve everything so far as possible, that time has consecrated; adapt the operation of traditional forces to suit present conditions; abhor confusion, and shun any policy which may produce it; be satisfied with less than the ideal; be generous rather than exacting; remember there is a higher justice than that framed in the law, and that all laws derive their efficacy from the spirit of obedience in the people.[2]
>
> Edmund Burke

> Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined. [3]
>
> Emile Durkheim

> Let us admit the case of the conservative: if we once start thinking no one can guarantee where we shall come out, except that many objects, ends and institutions are doomed. Every thinker puts some portion of an apparently stable world in peril and no one can wholly predict what will emerge in its place.[4]
>
> John Dewey

During the past two months all of us have all witnessed clear examples of politically conservative policy making by the Bush administration related to tax law and abortion. Consider the former, the

change in tax deductions which he introduced in his State of the Union Address and which he later had implemented by the Internal Revenue Service with an executive order. We were made aware almost instantly that the tax deduction which he had proposed was to be, in the end, no tax deduction at all; simply a delay of a year in terms of paying ones taxes, perhaps requiring the payment of more taxes next year than may be anticipated by some of the less well informed. Done for the sole purpose of providing more current income which would, hopefully, at least from from Bush's perspective, quickly enter the nation's economy, thereby mitigating the severity of the recession in which our nation currently is engulfed. Clearly subscribing to the ideas of such thinkers as Burke who pointed out two centuries ago that one needs to "... adapt the operation of traditional forces to suit present conditions,"[5] Bush revealed an illusory, conservative approach to the solution of a significant social problem.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to support the claim that a similar sort of conservative, illusory, technocratic rationality pervades recent educational policy making in New York State. This is clearly revealed in the March, 1991 publication of **A NEW COMPACT FOR LEARNING,** subtitled **Improving Public Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Education Results in the 1990s** (hereafter **New Compact**)[6] by The State Education Department (hereafter SED) of New York.

This publication was the product a period of more than two intensive years of effort by SED to work out a plan initially to improve elementary and secondary education; later to improve elementary, middle and secondary education throughout New York State. During this

period two earlier, related documents had been drafted and disseminated by SED. (1) "Top-Down Support for Bottom-Up Reform,"[7] a nine-page document published May 10, 1990; and (2) "A New Compact for Learning: A Partnership to Improve Education Results,"[8] (hereafter **Original Compact**) a nineteen page document, the immediate predecessor to the New Compact, published October 2, 1990.

By 'technocratic rationality', when applied to schooling, I mean the linear, instrumental organization of schooling which makes a rigid distinction between policy-making and implementation, between goals and means, between research and action, between scholarship and teaching, between knowing and doing. Students and teachers in particular are perceived as tools to be used by others to pursue goals over which they have little or no control. Such rationality is comparable to the organic views of society which we associate with the functionalist view of schooling; it is ". . . a theoretical orientation about how social events and institutions are to be viewed."[9] Drawn from the field of biology, Feinberg and Soltis point out that "functionalists note that the various systems of a biological organism serve different survival functions. . . functionalists argue that if we want to understand a certain social practice or institution, we must consider the way in which it serves to further the survvival of the social system as a whole. . . Just as the different parts and behaviors of an organism can be understood in terms of the function they serve in meeting the needs of survival," according to the perspective of functionalist claims adhered to by Feinberg and Soltis, "so, too, . . . can the practices and the institutions of a society be explained in terms of meeting certain social survival needs."[10] Harmony

among the elements in relation to the transcendant goals of the whole, then, constitutes the essence of functionalist thinking. The purpose of this paper, then, is neither normative or speculative, but rather analytical as it attempts to identify and critically assess those prominent components of the New Compact which compel me to conclude that technocratic rationality, a functionalist theory of educational policy-making and implementation, permeates this effort to improve schooling in New York State.

Assumptions

Two key assumptions are accepted by the author and provide the ground of support for the thinking which is expressed in this paper. (a) education basically is a moral endeavor and the New Compact, designed with the best of intentions in mind, is indeed, a moral document; and (b) there is no one best system, no one best response, for planning and implementing educational practice at any level of organizational structure, whether it be the state, the region, the local district, or the school.

Procedure

To pursue the purpose of this paper I have chosen to reduce the New Compact into two interdependent components. One of these I shall refer to as the Global or macro component; the other as the Village or micro component. The entire world as well as the U.S. and New York State comprise the Global component. A host of institutions, agencies, and/or persons, including students, parents, teachers, pupil support teams, principals, schools, school districts, communities, superintendents of schools, boards of education, BOCES, higher and continuing education,

libraries and other cultural institutions and business, industry and labor comprise the Village component.

Each of these components, in turn, has been sharply reduced by the construction and use of several related categories. The Global component is examined in terms of (a) Regents and (b) economics; The Village component is examined in terms of (a) shared purpose; (b) teacher education; (c) assessment and (d) choice. Let us commence our analysis of the New Compact by examining its Global nature.

Regents.

The statement is made early in the New Compact that ". . . there is general consensus on the goals for elementary and secondary education;"[11] a bit later, "The Regents Goals are perennial."[12] Stress is placed on the power of the Regents to dominate educational policy-making when they assert that they ". . . reendorse their 1984 'Statement of Regents Goals for Elementary- and Secondary-School Students,' and they will consider whether any modifications are essential for the new decade"[13]

When one examines the 1984 statement of goals one finds that they were and continue to be constructed in the language of behaviorism, with consistent stress placed on the phrase, 'will be able to', a hegemonizing view of thinking about goals which has been oppressing those who have been laboring in our schools since the dawn of the perfomance based movement in the early seventies. Indeed, the discourse throughout the New Compact, with its stress on *results,* is directly related to that earlier PBTE, CBTE, CBE period.

Indeed, in terms of the New Compact, it would be quite appropriate

to refer to it as *results based teacher education* (RBE), for there is a continual stress in this document on the need to emphasize and achieve results, with a conservative view which argues for much less stress on the need for resources to be invested in the process of education. There is no question whatever in the New Compact that the Global dimension the New Compact has been largely determined by a conservative power structure in command of educational policy-making in New York State. While it has had some public discussion and debate, its genesis lies largely within the authoritative structure which dominates our state educational system.

It is this power structure which has identified the goals which elementary and secondary public schools ought accept as guideposts for controlling the sort of schooling which the schools provide their students. . And, while not explicitly stated, one can detect in the New Compact a desire and interest of this authoritative structure to penetrate and control our colleges and universities as well. More about this matter later.

Economics.

Clearly related to the message generated by A Nation at Risk, the New Compact commences with the claim that times are changing and that we are entering a new era during which our country's economic preeminence is, or will soon be, threatened. The economy, the report maintains, "... no longer provides for ... unskilled labor . . . [and that] the quality of our civic life is impaired, [and] our standard of living is poised for decline."[14] Clearly there is a connection between the quality of the workers who are available for our businesses and industry and the

intellectual and moral knowledges and dispositions which they have acquired from our schools, our homes, and the larger milieu. There are, however, two problems created by this stress on the business connection, (a) determining the appropriate role of schools and (b) and the expectations of business. Businessmen ought not expect schools to prepare workers for their specific jobs. That ought to be the responsibility of each business. Nor ought they use schools as a scapegoat to prevent the larger public from detecting their own glaring inadequacies, not only in terms of product quality or pricing, but also in terms of their failure to recognize and to take steps to mitigate the ecological demage which they have frequently caused.

On the other hand schools ought to recognize that students need to acquire excellent intellectual, moral, and collaborative habits which will enable them either to enter the world of work or to go on to higher education.

When connections are established between the workplace and the school, in other words, we need to retain a clear distinction between these two environments. The standards employed by each to assess the quality of what they are doing differ significantly. And most certainly school people should not accept responsibilities in this relationship which they cannot handle. For instance, the fact that industry prices its products as it does, particularly when demand for products is soft, and the fact that industry increasingly is looking at foreign countries as places for relocating their factories, in each case affecting the availability of work, are not problems with which schools can have any impact whatever.

Let us now address the Village or micro component of the New Compact.

Shared purpose. To grasp the notion of shared purpose one must understand that the New Compact attempts to involve pratically every institution or professional role to be found in our culture in the process of improving the education of our elementary and secondary students. Indeed, an African proverb, "It takes the whole village to raise a child,"[15] is cited twice in the document. Clearly powerful stress is placed on the need to build partnerships, to establish linkages, to collaborate with all the institutions having an impact on the achievement of the child or the adolescent. It should be clear, of course, that this shared purpose will need to be functionally related to the Global goals which the Regents have brought forward from 1984 to guide the new system of education which the New Compact purportedly is said to create. It is unclear, of course, how a new system of schooling will emerge when an old set of goals is adopted to guide the the creation of a 'new' system and when it is clear that the stress on 'shared purposes' is one which compels the micro sector of our state to subordinate its decisions and actions to those prior decisions made by the Global power structure.

Teacher education. While the entire New Compact tends to reify the existing functional relationship in our state, there are specific examples in the document which indicate how this would occur, particularly for those of us engaged in teacher preparation. For instance the claim is made that"... higher education (particularly teacher preparation programs) can gain from the pedagogical skills, knowledge, and insights of practitioners from the schools"[16] And, a bit further on, the suggestion is

made that "greater involvement of practicing teachers and administrators in teacher-preparation programs as curriculum devleopers, as researchers, as guest presenters, as advisors, or in other roles"[17] should be emphasized. For the following reasons, I am not persuaded to accept this suggestion as quickly as some. (a) The most obvious is the reform movement itself which has suggested that our schools have not been performing as well as they should be; if this is so, then it would be wise for us not to involve practicing teachers who are themselves responsible for this condition, and who are likely to emphasize and replicate the very practices which we want our prospective teachers to avoid; (b) college and university personnel need to remain somewhat removed from the world of practical if they are to develop clear understandings and critical ideas which can be of significant value to practioners in our schools; and (c) too close a relationship with the schools could eventuate in what might be a closed system which becomes impervious to any sort of change. This is, for instance, an inherent challenge confronting those who would pursue the development of a Professional Development School along the lines of the Holmes Group. My experience with the field over three and one-half decades has been one in which I have regularly encountered people with minimal knowledge of the literature, with little time, and often only minimal desire, to pursue the study of pedagogy, or to acquire the conceptual images, theoretical understandings, and intellectual habits we associate with excellent teacher preparation. Too close an affiliation with the field can only lead to a sort of reinforcing cycle which makes it increasingly difficult to generate and systematically develop alternative

ways of thought. To a certain extent teacher educators and, I suspect, professional educators in other vocational domains, always have suffered from this malady. What we do need, and what the New Compact does not identify in any way, is a two-pronged effort by the state to identify and certify both faculty and public schools throughout the state who meet the standards of pedagogical and educological (foundational) excellence which would make them potentially powerful collaborators with teacher educators in the preparatory process. In other words not just any facult or any public school ought to be engaged in such an important moral and societal responsibility as teacher preparation.

One of the most disturbing aspects about the process of constructing the New Compact was its failure, largely, I am sure, because of simple oversight, to have made a concerted effort to involve university personnel, particularly teacher educators, in the dialogue which took place throughout the state when the New Compact was being publicly considered. No effort was made to encourage the participation of university personnel when the Regents held hearings around the state for the purpose of eliciting public dialogue and debate about the substance of the Original Compact. While I myself did participate in a number of them, contributing papers each time, this was, I suspect, the exception, not the rule. Further, my papers, were directed at elements in the Original Compact which were connected in each case to the lower schools.

Indeed, the role of higher education as outlined in the Original Compact, consisted of a brief paragraph followed by five suggestions for higher education, amounting to a total of 126 words, no more than a quarter of a page.[18] Clearly, in October, 1990, the role of higher education

within the framework of the Original Compact was perceived by SED as relatively modest. Certainly this version of the Compact did not emphasize the role of higher education enough to have motivated significant others in the higher education community to become alert about their need to attend, participate and express their views.

Consequently, when the New Compact was approved it was something of a shock to observe that the very modest entry pertaining to the role of higher education which had been included in the Original Compact had somehow been enlarged to more than one and one-half pages of the New Compact.

And what does the New Compact hold in store for higher education. Let me point out a few matters. To begin the document claims that "higher education and continuing education have a central role in achieving the desired outcomes."[19] If this is indeed the case then one must raise the question of why colleges and universities around the state were not alerted to this fact and strongly encouraged to partipate in the public discussions and debates. Clearly this was not done and hence the role of the higher education in the New Compact is not the result of much, if any, sigificant input from colleges and universities in New York State.

The document stipulates that "many colleges work directly with middle-level and high-school students, encouraging them to stay in school and assisting them to learn."[20] If this is meant to imply that colleges and universities should sponsor volunteer programs which enable college students to assist and nurture teenage youth in public schools in the learning process, then one can be quite supportive. On the other hand, if this stipulation is meant to imply that colleges should offer college

credit as an inducement to students to persuade them to assume the instructional responsibilities which local communities, school districts and public schools ought to be supporting, thereby enabling these communities and the state to reduce the additional financial support absolutely vital for the sustained improvement of public schools while at the same time attempting to achieve those results which are considered to be desirable in light of the goals established by the Global power structure, then I vigorously and adamanatly object. While no documentation or developed rationale is provided in the document to support the claim that colleges and universities in the state are, in fact, encouraging their students to work with children and youth in the lower schools, I remain, nonetheless, deeply concerned about the implications of a badly flawed implicit idea.

Just as I am profoundly concerned and alarmed by the current movement to develop instruments which will purport to assess the acquisition of liberal arts and professional knowledge by students attending our colleges and universities. Indeed, I consider this effort to be one of the most potentially damaging components of the New Compact. It is a movement which is a clear example of the instrumental, technocratic rationality implicit in this document. The attempt to align the curriculum and the assessment of learning by students attending our universities and colleges with the goals of the state in an effort to achieve what the New Compact consistently refers to as 'the desired results' is an unmistakable indication of the desire of the framers and perpetrators of the substance of this document to gain a significant measure of influence and control over the last bastion of liberty and freedom of thought which remains in our society. It is a most flagrant

violation of everything I have come to associate with what it means when one says that we have a university and what it means to be a member of the professoriate.

We must never lose sight of the principle of freedeom of thought which constitutes the core value of a university. This value assures its faculty of their right to inquire, to teach, to publish on matters at the cutting edge of their various disciplines. The construction and the eventual use of standardized assessment instruments which appear to be in the process of being developed under the auspicies of the ETS-National Teacher Examination, of the National Evaluation Systems; or under the rubric of the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), can and very probably will have a profoundly debilitating effect on the quality of education to be derived from any of our institutions of higher education. It will severely restrain university faculty from pursuing their own intellectual growth and it will sharply curtail their willingness and desire to expose their students to the most significant developments, the most challenging problems and uncertainties, confronting their respective fields. Faculty will, in other words, feel compelled, as are many teachers in New York's lower schools, to teach to the tests which their students will encounter. This can only result in a constraint on thought, inquiry and research in an institution which ought constantly to be encouraging openness, critical thought and the enlargement of human understanding. The ultimate loser from this process will be our New York State culture.

Assessment. The subtitle of the New Compact is "improving public elementary, middle, and secondary education results in the 1990s."[21]

Throughout the document one finds a continual stress placed on the 'results' of teaching and school practices. For instance, at one point in the document one finds that "The New Compact is about results, not inputs." [22] Along with this stress on results is the continued imposition of an accountability program which requires the schools to report their results to the public. Much of this reporting is likely to be based upon standardized instruments which require students to accept the belief that there are certain answers to all problems. And, to ensure 'quality control', the results of these standardized instruments will continue to be publicly reported; a process which most certainly will occur should such instruments be put in place in our colleges and universities.

Consider, for example, a brief report about a current approach to assessment which is going on at North Country, SUNY's smallest and most geographically dispersed institution. The report states that their assessment process "has also helped to ensure that regardless of where or when they are taught, and who teaches or takes them, all offerings of a given general education course develop the same competencies while preserving teaching flexibility and variety."[23] Can anyone imagine a system for the oppression of thought with more devastating consequences for human understanding and inquiry than this? Clearly this is an example, albeit a minor one, of technocratic rationality rearing its ugly head in higher education. It takes but little imagination to project with much accuracy how such a thought control system could be easily linked with the goals of the New Compact which have been adopted by the Global power structure, thereby seriously jeopardizing and distorting the functions of institutions of higher education throughout New York State.

Choice. Probably the most controversial idea suggested in the Original Compact, modified somewhat in The New Compact because of significant and justified adverse public reaction, is its commitment to the concept of school choice. Initially proposed in the Original Compact to please the conservative power structure in our state by including choice of nonpublic schools, including religious schools, The New Compact stipulates that "the Regents embrace parental choice of schools within and among public schools districts."[24] This claim notwithstanding, we ought not lose sight of the fact that during the summer of 1992, some months after The New Compact was adopted, the Regents, by a margin of only two votes, turned down a choice proposal which would have included nonpublic institutions, including religious institutions, as one of the choice options. The new Chancellor of the Regents, R. Carlos Carbellada spearheaded the drive to include these institutions in a choice package. While he has publicly asserted that the subject is now dead and no longer a relevant matter for the Regents, we would be remiss if we did not carefully monitor their agenda regarding this matter. Particularly because the issue of choice, with its accompanying stress on vouchers, is receiving such prominent attention from the Bush Administration's Education 2000 program and because people, particularly businessmen like Chancellor Carbellada, have been profoundly and lastingly influenced by the misguided thinking of writers like Chubb and Moe who claim that educational reform based on "school autonomy and parent-student choice, rather than direct democratic control and bureaucracy"[25] would bring about a new system of education. Indeed, these ivory-tower, think-tankers claim, ". . . choice *is* a panacea,"[26] to the problems they assert are

confronting our public schools. Some who have carefully analyzed the perspective of Chubb and Moe, however, have become sharply critical of their claims about the values inherent in choice. For instance, in an article well worth careful reading, following an extended analysis, Hogan points out that the work by Chubb and Moe is "deeply flawed."[27] He goes on to conclude that"Chubb and Moe's call for redemption through parental choice [is] intemperate and irresponsible."[28]

Powerful conservative forces, at the national as well as at the state level, however, are behind the movement to adopt and implement a choice policy which includes nonpublic, particularly religious schools, as well as public institutions. Despite Mr. Carballada's disclaimer, my hunch is that we have not seen the final effort by our regents to achieve support for such a policy in New York State. It behooves those of us committed to the support of public schools, institutions which are deeply rooted in those fundamental principles of democracy and those humanitarian institutional procedures which many in our country have been advocating ever since the Jacksonian era, to (a) become civic pedagogues, informing the larger culture of the potentially disastrous consequences for our constitutionaly based democracy if choice of nonpublic schooling becomes a reality, and to (b) monitor and resist this movement with utmost care wherever it rears its head.

Summary

The purpose of this paper was to support the claim that an implicit consequence of the New Compact for Learning will be the reification of technocratic rationality within the domain of public schooling throughout

New York State. Because there are a large number of institutions, agencies and professional roles embedded within this document, it was deemed necessary to reduce its content to two broad domains, the Global or macro and the Village or micro. Each of these domains was further subdivided in subordinate categories which were then used to analyze the explicit and implicit ideas contained in the New Compact, demonstrating in the process how the New Compact will very likely reify technocratic rationality both at the policy-making and the procedural levels of public schooling throughout New York State.

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